

Drafting 'Reform' Laws on Intelligence Agencies Won't Be Easy

By Martha Angle
Washington Star Staff Writer

President Ford and CIA Director William Colby think some members of Congress will do anything for a headline, including spilling everything they know about covert CIA projects abroad to the nearest available journalist.

Some members of Congress, on the other hand, think the President and Colby invite disclosure of supposedly classified information about the CIA's operations by refusing to give Congress any other means of blocking covert programs.

The controversy over American involvement in the Angolan civil war and new revelations of planned CIA funding for anti-Communist politicians in Italy have served to spotlight the weaknesses of congressional oversight procedures.

And both developments have raised questions on Capitol Hill and within the executive branch about the future usefulness of covert activity as a tool of foreign policy.

"YOU CANNOT have this kind of short-circuiting of the normal democratic process of debate and review and expect Congress to sit still for it any longer," said one Senate source.

"On the other hand, I think we've also seen that a covert operation which fits with the general political consensus in this country either doesn't leak or else doesn't create any stir if it should become public."

After a year of investigation of the American intelligence community, special congressional committees headed by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, and Rep. Otis Pike, D-N.Y., are hammering out recommendations for reform of the oversight process.

But both committees are finding it easier to identify the problems than to solve them.

The Senate committee — but not the House committee — has agreed to sit down with the executive branch and try to work out some reform legislation.

That plan evolved during conferences between Church and Sen. John Tower, R-Tex., ranking Republican on his committee, and senior White House officials. Ford has approved the plan, but Pike declined to join in these conferences.

IN ESSENCE, there are four fundamental questions confronting the select committees:

- Should the American government, through the CIA or other agencies, conduct any covert military or political activities in other countries?
- Who in Congress should know what the intelligence agencies are doing abroad, and when should they be told?
- What power should Congress have to force a halt to covert activities ordered by the President but considered unwise by the legislative branch?

• What sanctions, if any, should Congress adopt to keep its members from disclosing classified information?

For the better part of the 28 years the CIA has been in existence, Congress has preferred to know as little as possible about the less savory activities of the agency.

Only a few senior members of the House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees were privy to the agency's secrets, and these were conservative and cautious men with little inclination to question executive branch decisions on foreign policy and national security.

BUT A LITTLE over a year ago, Congress took its first gingerly step toward stronger oversight. An amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act for fiscal year 1975 required the CIA to report all of its covert overseas operations "in a timely fashion" to the "appropriate committees," specifically including for the first time the Senate Foreign Relations and House International Relations committees.

The Armed Services and Appropriations committees continued to limit CIA briefings to a handful of senior members, but the two foreign relations panels allowed all of their members to obtain access, either directly or indirectly, to the information provided by the CIA.

The result was dramatic. For the first time, members of Congress with little sympathy for the CIA and its

Continued

STAT